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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/04/2016  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [FR](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: IRAQI VP ABDEL-MEHDY MEETS WITH FM DOUSTE-BLAZY  
AND ELYSEE DIPLOMATIC ADVISOR

REF: STATE 109400

Classified By: POLITICAL MINISTER COUNSELOR JOSIAH ROSENBLATT, FOR REAS  
ONS 1.4 B/D

¶1. (C) Summary and comment: While in France for personal reasons, Iraqi Vice-President Abdel Abdel-Mehdi met on June 26 with FM Douste-Blazy and President Chirac's diplomatic advisor, Maurice Gourdault-Montagne. Abdel-Medhi also gave numerous press interviews during which he described the situation in Iraq but did not publicly press for more support for Iraq from the GOF. Abdel-Mehdi, a fluent French speaker with substantial personal ties to France, discussed with the MFA and Elysee his views on the situation in Iraq, although when asked about the Iraq Compact, he said he was uninformed of the details. Although the GOF maintained its reluctance to expand assistance, an MFA contact revealed in a later meeting with poloff that it was considering expanding its cultural ties/resources with the Kurdish north. Once fully scoped out, the Iraq Compact (reftel), with its multilateral framework, UN involvement, and stress on Iraqi ownership, provides just the right kind of vehicle to press for more substantial French assistance to Iraq. End summary and comment.

¶2. (C) Iraq VP Abdel-Mehdi met on June 26 with FM Douste-Blazy and separately, with President Chirac's diplomatic advisor Gourdault-Montagne. On June 29, poloff discussed the visit with the MFA's DAS-equivalent for Middle East Affairs Antoine Sivan and Iraq desk officer Bernard Chappedelaine. Sivan read extensively from the MFA's reporting of the Douste-Blazy meeting. According to Sivan, Abdel-Mehdi began by discussing the formation of the new Iraqi government, thanking the GOF for its forgiveness of 80 per cent of Iraqi debt, and calling on France to support the new government. Douste-Blazy responded that France was ready to help, but would need to see an increase in the level of overall security before engaging on the ground in Iraq.

¶3. (C) Douste-Blazy raised France's training programs for Iraqi government employees in the judicial and police services. (Note: In addition to sponsoring small groups of Iraqi students, the GOF trains approximately 500 Iraqis in the judicial and police sectors every year. End note.) He told Abdel-Mehdi it was necessary to improve the selection of Iraqi candidates for the training programs. Sivan explained that the GOF had received negative reports from its gendarmerie and magistrature training academies that Iraqi trainees refused to participate in the programs and insisted on being sent to Paris instead of the provinces. Iraqi Embassy DCM Nafia Mahdy confirmed to poloff July 3 that this issue had been raised. Abdel-Mehdi said he would look into the Iraqi selection process. Sivan said the GOF was open to increasing training programs for Iraq, but that initial reports on Iraq trainees had been so negative that the MFA had been forced to defend the training program from the criticisms of other French ministries.

¶4. (C) Abdel-Mehdi outlined to Douste-Blazy his views on the Iraqi political process. He said that Iraq was faced with numerous destabilizing factors, but that there had been real progress in recent months. He believed that the Iranian influence in Iraq was being exaggerated, and said that a strong Iran-Iraq relationship and a strong Iraq-U.S. relationship were not mutually exclusive. Abdel-Mehdi added that he was optimistic that the situation was improving in the south of Iraq. Sivan commented that he considered Abdel-Mehdi a forthright and honest interlocutor, but that Abdel-Mehdi's opinion regarding the situation in the south seemed overly optimistic.

¶5. (C) Poloff asked Sivan if the GOF was considering any other gestures towards the Iraqi government. Sivan said France was considering expanding its cultural resources in the Kurdish north, but that any other type of initiative was on hold until the security situation improved. Douste-Blazy, said Sivan, had asked Abdel-Mehdi about the Iraq Compact, but the Iraqi VP said he was not aware of the latest details. Sivan complained that the Iraqi government had repeatedly changed Abdel-Mehdi's appointment requests. The GOF, said Sivan, had originally proposed a much larger slate of meetings for Abdel-Mehdi, to include PM Villepin, but that the frequent time and date changes had forced the GOF to minimize the Iraqi VP's schedule. (Note: Abdel-Mehdi, who is fluent in French, frequently visits France for personal reasons, and has extensive personal ties here. Although he has had contacts with GOF officials on Iraq as Vice-President and previously, as Minister of Finance, these contacts have been sporadic at best. Sivan told poloff that the GOF has not insisted, but knowing Abdel-Mehdi's connection with France, has been eager whenever possible to accomodate his infrequent requests for meetings. End note.)

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¶6. (C) Iraqi Embassy DCM Mahdy noted that Douste-Blazy raised the presence of foreign troops in Iraq. Douste-Blazy reportedly said that, in France's opinion, the withdrawal of these troops was essential to reducing violence in Iraq. Sivan did not mention this in his debrief with poloff. According to Mahdy, Douste-Blazy was insistent on this point, but Gourdault-Montagne did not raise it at all.

¶7. (C) Comment: Both sides clearly felt considerable frustration with the other, and both stated, either directly (the Iraqi DCM) or indirectly (Sivan), that the ball was in the other side's court. Mahdy said the Iraqi Embassy was focused on improving the relationship "little by little," and was not expecting any grand gestures from the French. Given the GOF's reluctance thus far to ratchet up its support for the Iraq government (usually citing security conditions), Abdel-Mehdi's and the Iraqi Embassy's cautious engagement is perhaps understandable. That said, the Iraq Compact (reftel) with its multilateral framework, UN involvement, and stress on Iraqi ownership, provides just the right kind of vehicle to press for more substantial French assistance to Iraq. End comment.

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